Interview with Richard McCoy

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

RICHARD McCOY

Interviewed by: Bill Morgan

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Q: Let's start off, Dick, with what brought you into the Foreign Service. Briefly what got you this way?

MCCOY: Well, coincidentally I served four years in the United States Marine Corps and the last 26 months was spent as a Marine security guard at the American Embassy in Copenhagen. From that assignment I drew great interest in the conduct of foreign affairs. So I left the Marines and went to college and later on, when the opportunity presented itself, I entered the Foreign Service in June of 1966.

Q: And then, once into the Foreign Service, you eventually got interested in consular affairs. What brought you in that direction?

MCCOY: Well, I was always interested in the consular function, even when I was a Marine security guard, because I've always liked working with people. I realized, in a very limited way, when I was in Copenhagen, that the consular function primarily worked with people in various ways.

However, I initially entered the Foreign Service as a general services officer in an administrative cone, and after one year, in my first assignment in San Jose, Costa Rica,

they abolished my job. From that auspicious beginning I was transferred to the consular section because, again coincidentally, the visa officer left unexpectedly for another assignment so there was a vacancy. I was asked if I would be willing to fill it for the remainder of my tour, which I, of course, agreed to do.

Q: What was your reaction to that very first real exposure to the consular function at relatively small post?

MCCOY: I was very excited, although it was a difficult undertaking because I had no prior training at all. I went right into the job. I remember the chief of the consular section gave me an immigrant visa and told me to take it home with me on Friday, since I was starting on Monday in the consular section, and to memorize the various documents that went into it. Then he explained a little about non-immigrant visas and said, “It's all yours.” So from that I began my career as a consular officer.

Q: You mean you didn't have a consular course in your earlier days?

MCCOY: No.

Q: Well, you survived it obviously.

MCCOY: I survived. I had a lot of help from the Foreign Service national, in the consular section in San Jose. This brings me to another issue which, of course, is near and dear to consular cone officers as well as administrative officers. That is, working with Foreign Service national employees at our embassies. Truly in the consular field we have some very dedicated and very knowledgeable employees, people who are well-educated and who perform very well for us.

I can recall instances when I was assigned in Tel Aviv and again, maybe less so in Turkey, but later on in Yugoslavia, where we had Foreign Service national employees of

considerable stature which greatly helped us in our protection and welfare areas which in the cases of Israel and Yugoslavia were very demanding.

Q: There are those that say that some Foreign Service nationals have such command of the consular section that the junior officers who are often the ones that are supervising them just abdicate their roles as supervisor and as leader. How do you look at that relationship?

MCCOY: Well, that's true. What you have in many instances are junior officers in their '20s coming in, and they are working with a Foreign Service national who, maybe, has had 30, 40 years experience at their job. So there is a certain element and it could also be that the national employee has a very strong aggressive personality the FSO doesn't. But where I supervised national employees at all my posts that I served abroad, I always emphasized to them that I worked with them, that I accepted their advice, and that I found that that stood me in very good stead.

A number of officers conversely felt they had to prove, I guess, their sense that they were officers and the other people weren't, and consequently you would have conflict. Generally those officers fared badly, because Foreign Service nationals had a great wealth of experience and they could help a young officer along. So I always made it a point to have my officers be sure to work with their Foreign Service national colleagues.

Q: Another part of that relationship between especially the young officers and Foreign Service nationals is the unfortunate problem that does creep in from time to time and that is bribery and fraud and other mismanagement. How did you focus on the responsibility of the junior officer in such things to make sure there was no instance of fraud and mismanagement?

MCCOY: That, of course, is always very difficult: The result is that what I tried to do was to have the officers and national understand the problem and to try and work closely to

prevent fraud et al. At the same time, they needed to recognize that in the final analysis the officer has the primary responsibility.

Q: One of the experiences you had in your first, say, almost ten years, was serving in small posts. Any particular message there on how you developed relationships with others in the small mission? Any small mission, small post lessons that you have for us?

MCCOY: One of the things, of course, that you always learn in a small post, and unfortunately they seem to be disappearing these days because of budgetary reasons, is the ability to become flexible, to make sure you learn and function in a large number of different Foreign Service areas. For example, in Adana, Turkey I was into economic reporting, political military affairs, running the post when the principal officer was gone, administrative functions, as well as the traditional consular function, although we did not issue visas in Adana. The same in Zagreb. In Zagreb I was involved in just about every area of the, traditional Foreign Service function. And I found those experiences to be extremely valuable later on in my career.

Q: Going to a larger post like Tel Aviv, you brought those same lessons along, but could you translate them now into what particular lessons you learned at a large post, such as Tel Aviv, which has a very large consular function?

MCCOY: In a major post like Tel Aviv, you are truly locked into more or less one area. Tel Aviv is somewhat unique because of its nature, from our perspective, the administrative capital of Israel. We had tremendous numbers of distinguished visitors, congressional delegations, and visits by the Secretary of State. So you had a chance to do things other than just a straight-line consular job. The advantage of a large post for a consular cone officer is that you learn how to supervise both American officers as well as a large number of Foreign Service nationals.The issue you have at a small post is there you're not so much supervising large numbers of people, but rather you're starting to learn how to manage a wide variety of programs.

Q: You have also, in a post like Tel Aviv, a high visibility work and consular function, or to put it differently, you were closely tied with economic realities of the country. Any particular messages there of that relationship and how you worked particularly, perhaps, in visas, but also in protection and welfare with the highly politicized society?

MCCOY: Visas were fairly simple. We didn't have, in those days, a problem relating to whether people would return or not. In fact, that was a rather sensitive issue as to whether they would return, because in the war of 1967, you may recall the Israelis returning in great droves from wherever they were around the world. So that was not quite as much of an issue as, let's say, it would have been in Costa Rica or in later posts like Guyana.

Protection and welfare was extremely difficult. We had large numbers of American citizens, many of them elderly, and quite a few of them with mental problems. The result is that what you had was, from a citizenship, protection and welfare area, the problems were much more difficult and intense.

For example, one Christmas, I remember, we had a woman who was mentally deficient show up with three children under the age of five. And the Israelis, even though she was Jewish, did not want to accept her under the law of return. So, consequently, I had a very difficult Christmas holiday that year. But fortunately, through the help again of our distinguished Foreign Service national we were able to resolve the matter.

Q: It would seem to be also, particularly in protection and welfare, that you would get a lot of so-called intervention as we say in our trade congressionals. What kind of congressional intervention, pressures or from other parts of the government did you have?

MCCOY: Well, obviously there was congressional interest, I suspect not as much as there is now, though, primarily except for the issue of the Soviet Jews coming out who immediately then would want to travel to the United States and would be sponsored by

some very prominent American citizens. The protection and welfare issue was much more intense, but not as involved with Congress as you would think.

Q: In that relationship or others, how did you find support from the bosses, the ambassador or others in the post, in what you were trying to do, in some cases almost contradictory influences bearing on you?

MCCOY: We had an interesting ambassador. He was one of the old-line Foreign Service ambassadors from the George Kennan and Llewellyn Thompson era who had come in in the early '30s, a man of independent means, a bachelor but a man who would give us the time if we thought we needed it. He pretty much allowed his DCM to run the embassy, and he concentrated primarily on the political and economic issues that went on between the two nations, a bilateral relationship which, as you know, is a very complex and important one.

I had two different consul general when I was there. They both pretty much left me alone which in some cases was wrong because I could have used some help. But I must say, I learned a tremendous amount there, probably more on the protection and welfare and citizenship than I could have in any place because, as you know, at that time, we were dealing very heavily with cases involving people who were serving in the Israeli army and who had voted in Israeli elections and this had resulted in a Supreme Court decision.

Q: Put differently, you feel you did get support then from top management both practical as well as advisory?

MCCOY: Yes and, of course, they were very, particularly the DCM was very, sensitive to the desires of the officers in the consular section particularly the more junior officers — that was my second tour — to get us involved in other areas of the embassy. That was very important for us. I must say, I learned a lot from that gentleman in terms of how an embassy should be operated and run.

Q: What form did this take, this training of other junior officers, and what kinds of things were they encouraged to do and could you help them do in terms of their own responsibilities in the consular section?

MCCOY: Well, basically what you try to do is to explain to the officers the function of their jobs, how they should perform them, the relationship in dealing with the Foreign Service nationals, the culture under which they were now operating in terms of dealing with Israelis and their relationships outside the embassy. To develop working relationship with the police, local attorneys, doctors and other areas such as prison visits. Then, of course, within the embassy, if they are going to travel to make sure they touch base with the political and economic section and the DCM to see if there is any particular interest they might have.

Q: Did these junior officers, in turn, sense what they were doing in terms of total mission objectives? Did they feel it was important?

MCCOY: I think so because in the case of Tel Aviv, in particular, we were all on a roster to perform control officer duties, as one example. So, therefore, we would find ourselves very much involved in the whole issue relating to that and in addition to others. The DCM was very good about having periodic meetings with the junior officers within the mission to make sure that they were reviewed in the reading file frequently or went to staff meetings and other things of that nature. And that was very useful.

Q: Before we move on to Georgetown, which was one of the more dramatic assignments you had, is there anything else in those first couple of assignments that you want to tell us about?

MCCOY: The Adana assignment was difficult because for a whole year we were under threat of terrorist attack of the consulate. That was an interesting tour. Zagreb was also fascinating in a lot of ways particularly because of, again, the protection and welfare and

working with the communist bureaucracy where everything is politicized. It doesn't matter what your assignment is, everything is politicized, and you have to approach your job from that perspective.

Q: Even though Yugoslavia supposedly has a special title to its communist affiliation, it still has many of the attributes of a communist state. Do you want to give us any examples of what it was like to serve in a communist state?

MCCOY: For example, we had one American who was tried and convicted of espionage. We found evidence that stolen U.S. military weapons were being smuggled into the country by Croatian nationalists, and I was involved tangentially in that. We had, for example, many social security trips, because we had over 5,000 social security annuitants in my consular district. Some areas where I had to travel were restricted areas by the Yugoslavs because of their military bases, and so. I had to get special permission for that. So it was a fascinating assignment in that regard.

Q: In comparison to Tel Aviv where it was also a very highly politicized society, if you will, is there any comments on the relationship with the bosses, with post management, vis-a-vis the consular function?

MCCOY: I had tremendous support from my consul general in Zagreb. He was very supportive and very helpful. The same for the ambassador who was for most of the time a non-professional. So basically, I suppose, I've been very fortunate in that in all the posts that I have served, I had great support from the post leadership.

Q: Some of us say it takes two to tango, however, which means that obviously you knew how to extract the best out of the bosses. Any particular examples or messages there, how to go about it?

MCCOY: I think I always made it very clear in all the posts that I served at that I was truly there to support the mission. I wasn't there just to perform consular work. And in many

cases, particularly in Costa Rica, less so in Israel but certainly in Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Guyana, I drafted numerous memorandums of conversation which I think the embassy found very useful in its overall political reporting program.

Q: In other words you weren't too parochial in your responsibilities?

MCCOY: Well, I was a Foreign Service officer first. And I think as a Foreign Service officer you have to understand that.

Q: And you went on to be a real Foreign Service officer in every aspect of the word in Guyana. Tell us what you first did when you got there and then how the more dramatic days came farther on in your assignment.

MCCOY: I was assigned to Georgetown as the chief of consular section from 1976 to 1978 and not realizing it I found I was the second ranking officer in the embassy. We did not have an ambassador there. We had a charge'. Six weeks into my assignment there was a terrible incident that took place on a Guyana airline plane that was blown up over Barbados in which a number of Guyanese were killed. Apparently ten or twelve years previously there had been some very minor connection between CIA and the organization, a Cuban exile organization, which was responsible for blowing up the airliner.

Consequently, because of the loss of life and the dramatic occurrence, the Guyanese Government really had some harsh words for our government as a result of which our charge was pulled out in protest. And there I found myself Charg# of a Class III embassy with a fully operational CIA/AID/USIS operation as well as the traditional Foreign Service sections. I was Charg# there for three and a half months.

We had some very interesting times. For example, we had threats against the embassy, to blow it up, burn it down, and in a wooden embassy building that's a real threat. There were even threats to kidnap certain of our dependent children, to take them to the interior.

Interestingly enough saner heads prevailed within the government and no outright breech occurred. At one point, we really thought we were going to have to shut the mission down and leave. Fortunately that did not occur, but there were some very tense times.

Q: What kind of support did you get from Washington from both State and other agencies?

MCCOY: Very little. Initially there was a lot of support, although it's always interesting when the country in which you are represented, where you are, is in bad odor in Washington, somehow that translates itself to the embassy people. So it was fascinating to get these cables directing me to either have no contact whatsoever, which, of course, is impossible or to make some very strong protest in language which was quite frankly uncalled for. One example that I had to confirm was when our Press Spokesman called the Guyanese Prime Minister a bald-face liar.

So that was my first experience in how I was going to have to run this embassy, by dealing with a government which I wasn't suppose to be in contact with, in a society where our embassy was being threatened, in which the policies, of course, were non-responsive and our embassy personnel were under some indirect threats.

Q: It sounds to me as if the buck ended up on your desk. Therefore, your dependency on the rest of the embassy and the other parts of the mission was vital. How did you work with them? What kind of cooperation did you get? What were some of the trouble areas?

MCCOY: Actually I had great cooperation from all political elements in the embassy as well as the USIA director who was a man of some experience in the country and, interestingly enough, from my Canadian and English colleagues.

Q: Were they fellow sufferers?

MCCOY: In a sense, yes. The result being that I found myself though, having to deal with primarily the substantive problems of the reporting which was simple. The real problem I

had was between my admin officer and GSO. They didn't get along at all. And so that was creating some very serious internal problems within the embassy. But fortunately, having had the experience of both being a GSO and an admin officer, I was able to resolve those problems.

Q: Without exception there wasn't any real serious problems of mission objectives under you?

MCCOY: Well, I like to think there weren't. There were some serious problems within the mission of people panicking because of the threats they felt, against their families and in some instances we did allow some people to leave.

Q: Did you have to make those decisions?

MCCOY: Yes, the Department was helpful in that respect, in helping me make the decision in that regard.

Q: Then finally one day you were no longer charge'.

MCCOY: That's right. The situation stabilized. Things calmed down. We had a presidential election. The outgoing administration decided to leave things as they were. When the new administration came in, they decided to try and resolve the problems, and they did so by returning the Charge'.

Q: Then you could go back to your consular section and focus on, not that you weren't before, but focus seriously on any developing issues out in the hinterland which, indeed, there were. Do you want to tell us about those?

MCCOY: Well, yes. That was, of course, the People's Temple. When I first arrived there, the People's Temple was a very small organization. It later developed into a larger organization in the summer of '77 when, for some reason, presumably because of

problems in the United States, large numbers of Temple members began an influx into the country.

Q: Tell us what the Temple was just briefly.

MCCOY: People's Temple was a pseudo-political authoritarian organization run by a thwarted minister who developed, in effect, what was a cult or a cult-oriented organization.

Q: And this was back in the period in which cults were almost the thing?

MCCOY: No, this is when cults were almost unknown in the international area. I mean, in a sense, that it was not something that we, in the Department, ever had to deal with. I presume there are always groups of people, but they had never really come to our attention in any manner.

And, of course, the Temple initially had the Reverend Jim Jones, its titular head, who had initially been the head of the San Francisco Housing Authority. He had developed a very tightly organized cadre, around him out of about ten to twelve people, and then had an organization of probably 1500 members. They developed an area in northwest Guyana with the help of the local populace, and had cleared an area of about 450 to 600 acres. They were developing quite an agricultural community. They had electricity. They had refrigeration. They had chickens and pigs. They had set up prefabricated housing. They were trying to be self-sufficient.

Q: They had the support of the government then. Why? Why would the Guyana Government want them there?

MCCOY: The government wanted them there for two reasons. One, the government was having a very serious problem with finances. At least one percent of the entire population of 800,000 people were listed with us for immigration to the United States and that didn't count those leaving to go to Great Britain or to Canada. So, consequently, the fact a

group of Americans would come to Guyana and wish to live was a great propaganda ploy for them. Also, the government of Guyana purported to be a Marxist government. The People's Temple organization claimed to be organized along Marxist-socialist lines and had a political philosophy very akin to Marxism. And so, as a result, both from a political and public relations standpoint, the People's Temple was very welcome.

Q: At what point did you start finding yourself really involved with the group, what they were doing?

MCCOY: My initial contact came when I was Charg# in December, 1976 when Reverend Jones came in with the Lieutenant Governor of California, a man who's now a member of Congress, Mervin Dymally. He wanted to visit the community because it was made up predominately of people from California. As Charg#, because he was Lieutenant Governor, I went and paid a call on him and Rev. Jones. The situation vis-a-vis the People's Temple at that time, seemed relatively normal.

Then in the summer of 1977, large groups of Temple members began coming to Guyana, and certain members of the security immigrations services of Guyana began to be a little bit concerned about what their overall motive was. This suspicion was, I think, primarily because they couldn't believe Americans would really, truly want to come and live in Guyana. So they considered there was an ulterior motive behind this entry of large groups of Americans.

In addition to that, we began to get press reports about the People's Temple and its organization relating to such things as threats of intimidation, coercion, and physical abuse. And I began to get letters from relatives of members of the Temple who were in Guyana to please check on them to see if they were all right.

As a result of this, I made my first visit to Jonestown in, I believe it was, August, 1977. This was a first of several visits. I recall going up into the Northwest District. Now, one of the things you have to understand is when you go into the Northwest District of Guyana, it's

not like getting into your car and driving 150 miles and going somewhere. Guyana, outside of the Georgetown area, is very isolated and remote. The only way you could get there was by airplane because you crossed about 100 miles of truly trackless jungle because, after all, you're in the Orinoco Basin there. It's right up near the border of Venezuela, which brings another point to mind.

The Guyanese were also very happy that this American group moved in where they did because they were very concerned about Venezuelan territorial claims against that part of Guyana. They felt that this would create a buffer zone for them in that regard.

So I flew to Northwest District, met with the regional officer of the government there who proceeded immediately to tell me that he had a member of the People's Temple in their local clinic who was claiming that he had been mistreated and abused by members of the Temple.

Q: Was the government official helpful, responsive to you?

MCCOY: Yes, very much so.

Q: He wasn't fighting your being there?

MCCOY: Oh, no. They were very concerned. He was very concerned. So I went and talked to this man. He, of course, denied any abuse on the part of the Temple, claimed that the scars he had were from handling rough lumber. He had some scars on the top of shoulders and cuts there. So I asked him if he wanted to go back to the United States. He said, “Yes.” I said, “Fine.” And I did arrange for him to go back to the United States, at People's Temple expense, I might add. And so the Temple arranged for him to return to the United States. However, the regional officer there still had some lingering suspicion that things were all not well.

Q: What was your first impression of the physical layout of the camp?

MCCOY: The first impression you have is that it's quite an impressive undertaking. I mean, this is a very rough, underdeveloped country where the climate was not too bad because you're up 2,000 feet there, but still it's heavy jungle with all the problems of the climate, wild animals, etc. They had obviously made quite an investment there. They had their own mill where they could make these prefabricated houses where they had tin roofs and wooden floors and things. And they were pretty well built, not something maybe you or I would like to live in, but certainly, in terms of that area, quite substantial. Some of the other things they had were a refrigeration plant and egg hatchery and things of that nature.

Q: So then over the next few months, or whatever period it was, you began to get more reports and was it always you going there or did you send someone else?

MCCOY: No, I always went. The ambassador decided it was important that I go because my vice consuls were all first tour junior officers. He and I both decided that this was a very sophisticated problem. After all, up to now there had been no examples in the Foreign Service, that anyone knew, in dealing with this kind of situation. We were dealing with American citizens. We were getting complaints about American citizens being abused by other American citizens. Plus when you have the new passage of the Privacy Act, the Freedom of Information Act, this created in itself some very difficult legal problems for us.

Q: Let's stop the clock there before we get into the full tragedy of that. What kind of support and advice were you getting from the Department? I sense good support from the ambassador, but again what kinds of support from the mission itself as well as the ambassador?

MCCOY: As I indicated to you, the ambassador was extremely supportive. He was a very experienced career professional who had arrived in Georgetown in the summer of 1977 and who realized that service in the Caribbean meant that the consular function was a very important element within the embassy overall because of the nature of our bilateral relationships created by this heavy demand for visas.

So when the People's Temple issue came up, we consulted almost daily because there were some other ancillary problems. For example, there was a child custody case that was going on at the same time which was creating a great deal of interest in the government. The Temple was on one side opposing the parents who were trying to get their child back and who were former senior Temple members. That was one side. Then we were getting an increasing number of requests to look into allegations of abuse up at Jonestown. So, consequently, I made another trip.

One of the things that I decided early on, because of the uncertain nature of what this was all about, was that when I would go into the camp I would never stay overnight. I would always go in with a representative of the government of Guyana, and I would always go in with Guyanese government transportation, not that they had a lot, they didn't. But what they had they loaned me. I always made it a point when I talked to these people to make sure I checked their passports independently, and when I talked to them, I always talked well away from any outside interference on the part of Temple members. This was to allow the person that was talking to me to speak without fear of intimidation or being overheard.

Q: This again goes back to the word you used before, "privacy" and my question about support from the Department, what kind of advice were you getting on how to work with sort of a middle-ground on privacy versus what turned out to be a real tragedy.

MCCOY: I really didn't get much advice at all initially because, I suspect in part, the Department really looked at this as just a simple protection and welfare situation. But as the nature of the problem began to grow, for a while I received some very good advice from Elizabeth Powers who was, at that time, in Welfare and Whereabouts in the old organization before OCS/EMR, what is now the Overseas Consular Services/Emergency Center. She was very good. Unfortunately after she left, in the spring of '78, it then got a little chaotic because there was about a four month period there when I had really no guidance at all. Unfortunately, the airgram that was prepared by the Department on the Privacy Act and on how to deal with this situation under the Privacy Act for some reason

never was sent to any of the Caribbean posts. It wasn't until a consular conference was held in May of 1978 in the Department that I realized this.

Q: And there was nobody that sort of could pull this all together for you? The right and the left hand were . . .

MCCOY: What happened at the Conference, Michele Truitt, who I believe at that time was working for Assistant Secretary Watson, had helped draft this airgram, and she came in and briefed us all on it. So after that I was able to talk to her and get some specific information on how to handle this situation under the Privacy Act. Fortunately, she was aware of the problems that were going on relating to the Temple.

Q: But basically you were just using your good sense on how to deal with the individual's rights and answer questions under the Privacy Act.

MCCOY: The problem you had here was the rights of privacy of an American citizen as opposed to whether or not they were breaking the law. So, at that point, the ambassador decided that what he would send a cable to Washington, because this was a very unusual situation, requesting the Department's approval for us to go to the government of Guyana with a diplomatic note asking them to please investigate the situation at Jonestown with a view to making sure that no American citizen's rights were being abridged by other American citizens, which as you can see, is a really unusual situation. The Department came back and said they saw no reason to do that.

Q: This was presumably from the geographic bureau.

MCCOY: No, this originated between CA and L/CA (Office of Legal Affairs: Consular).

Q: Oh, I see.

MCCOY: The geographic bureau really played very little role in this which later to their chagrin they were severely criticized for.

Q: Despite the ambassador's obvious sensitivity to it, he couldn't shake up the political side of the State Department?

MCCOY: He was quite irritated with his desk officer which presumably we will get into, I know, later on, which is one of the reasons why the ambassador recommended I go back as a desk officer.

Q: Let's then get into this peak, if you will, of the drama.

MCCOY: What, of course, then occurred was, I made one more trip to Jonestown. I took the DCM with me at that point. Conditions in the camp in turns of the physical layout had improved but I felt the good Reverend Jones was deteriorating physically. But I wasn't sure what kind of role this was going to play.

Q: This is now maybe a year had gone by?

MCCOY: Yes, it was close to a year. I then was not able to go back. I had planned a trip up there just before I was reassigned out of Georgetown back to the Department. I couldn't get back up there because of bad weather. We didn't have a landing site because it was muddy and wet, and you couldn't land nor could we get over land from the one place where we could land because the road was impossible.

I left in August of 1978 to come back to the Department and at that point a U.S. Congressman from California decided he wanted to visit Guyana. I was detailed to brief him and his staff on conditions and what they could expect and so on. Of course, what it came down to, I told him, if they went there with the press they could expect a hostile reception. Now, I obviously didn't anticipate that the hostility would result in them being killed, at least the Congressman being killed. They asked me that specifically if the people

would get violent against them. And I said I really didn't know. They hadn't gotten violent toward me.

Q: You had seen no real signs of violence before?

MCCOY: No, not directed against me personally. And so the result was that I just had to qualify my answer to him. I said, “But if you go, and take press with you, probably what they'll do is not let you in” which is what occurred initially. And then apparently Congressman Ryan who is the gentleman in question was able to negotiate his way into the camp with the press. Then the situation became hostile and, of course, the rest is all history.

Q: You alluded to being back in Washington now, your association with the desk and so on. One, tell us more about how you got that; and two, what you found yourself doing in that job?

MCCOY: One thing I would like to mention is when I came back on the desk, one of the things I did was brief the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, Miss Watson, and her staff and the Assistant Secretary for InterAmerican Affairs and his staff, Ambassador Vaky, on the Temple situation. Then this evolved into Congressman Ryan's visit and then, of course, we had the Jonestown tragedy which occurred in November. From the Department perspective, I played a leading role in putting together the briefing papers for the Secretary and then helping brief the press spokesman who was at that time our Deputy Assistant Secretary for InterAmerican Affairs, John Bushnell. We were working together almost 24 hours a day. For the first couple of weeks it was extremely intensive.I went through a very difficult period. There were allegations, obviously, that came up. Why did the consul or why did the embassy allow this to happen? Of course, we all know why it could happen, because there's no way you can stop it, that is the mass suicide and murder. Secondly, there were some allegations that Mr. Jones had suborned me through the use of women which fortunately were laid to rest.

Later on, of course, I was interviewed extensively by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Secret Service, and by the Departments of Justice and State. Fortunately, I came out of that very well. I guess which leads me to one final conclusion which is when you're dealing in a situation like this and you really don't have a whole lot of help, because nobody really knows what to do, then you've got to follow your instincts and just do the best you can and hope. And if it doesn't work out it, just doesn't work out.

Q: So while you hope for guidance you still are basically dependent on your own instincts which you, in the case, developed from the series of very good assignments and good bosses. At the same time, when we have something as dramatic as this happen to us we'd like to think the institution, maybe, profited a little bit. Was there any lessons that the State Department got out of this?

MCCOY: One of the things, of course, that has helped — and I must say one thing, I received tremendous support from elements within the Department. It was amazing how people came up to me and said that they were sure that things would work out. Even my former non-career ambassador, Laurence Silberman, our ambassador in Yugoslavia, a very prominent attorney who is now a member of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, offered pro-bono his legal services if I needed it.

So, on balance, while people always seem to complain that, when officers get into trouble they never get support in my particular instance that was not the case. Miss Watson, the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Miss Clark who ran MMO, up through Secretary Vance, were very supportive.

I believe the Department put together a team in which we came up with lessons learned and how to deal with these situations. That plus the reorganization within the consular bureau into OCS to handle specific regional problems and to respond more adequately to problems like this. We have seen a much greater emphasis put on this, which started

back with Congressman Fascell in terms of his helping us develop funds for prisoners and various other forms of protection and welfare issues.

In my period of service in Tel Aviv, on the issue relating to whether Jerusalem should be unified with Israel or remain an independent entity. I began collating information, and I found out that the ambassador was particularly delighted, as was the head of the political section, because as it turned out, we had very little contact with Israeli students and their attitudes. Then I arranged to have several other officers work with me to begin, without abridging on their visa function, to discuss with them various attitudes within the course of their visa interview.

Q: Was it sort of "anything to get me off the visa line?"

MCCOY: No, not really. I enjoyed visa work. It never particularly bothered me. I had spent a very tough year as a protection and welfare officer in Israel and, in fact, had asked after a year to move to visas, because I can assure you I had some very difficult—nothing to compare with Jonestown—but some other very, very difficult protection and welfare cases in Israel.

Q: For example?

MCCOY: I had one gentleman who came in to see me and wanted to know if they buried people alive in Israel. He had been a Polish Jew who had been captured by the Nazis, and buried alive, shot and left for dead, and still suffered mental problems. We had an enormous number of mentally ill Americans in the country who had come back to find God. One woman, middle aged, continually wandered out into the Sinai, a couple of times was found in the middle of mine fields by Israeli Army patrols.

So over a period of a year, this was a fairly wearying experience, because it was not only just work days, it was nights and weekends. As you can imagine, a large number of people

travel to Israel, regardless of their religious affiliation. We had a very heavy workload, and I was the only protection and welfare officer.

Q: Since today the world knows the battle between the Palestinian and the Israeli, it's on the front page in every paper, did that involve you? Did you find yourself protecting American Arabs, for example?

MCCOY: In some cases, yes. Most of them were handled by the consulate in Jerusalem, but we did handle those who were from the Gaza Strip. This was a particular problem. The other problem we had was the forced induction of American Jewish people into the Israeli Army, and then once they were inducted, they were forbidden to visit the embassies. We had some interesting problems with the Israelis over this issue.

This was at the time when there were a number of hallmark citizenship cases relating to voting and to serving in the Army. It was particularly because the Israeli Government and the way they acted on the law of return and how they implemented the law of return for American Jews. Initially, when a person voted, they lost their citizenship. It was considered an act of allegiance to a foreign country. It was taken to the Supreme Court, and the plaintiff won.

So consequently, as a citizenship and protection and welfare officer, I had to go through literally hundreds of cases dealing with people in this area, as well as protection and welfare. So after a year, I was ready to go to the visa unit.

Q: These examples you are giving in protection and welfare, and I'm sure visas was the same, were coupled with those that I had in Beirut about that same time, which reminds me—and I ask for your comment—how closely tied the consular function is in an area like that with political realities and political function, if you will, of the entire mission.

MCCOY: That's true. That report that I did was very well received except by my consul general. He got very irritated with it. He thought that I wasn't doing my job; I was “wasting

my time" doing things which were not my job. I, of course, disagreed with him. He was an officer who believed that the consular function was the consular function and not a political function, and never the twain shall meet.

Q: How did you deal with this?

MCCOY: I disagreed with him.

Q: Beyond disagreement.

MCCOY: I basically dealt with it on the basis that I felt that many times we did get biographic and other information through the visa interview and our travels in our consular function, and therefore I felt that as a Foreign Service officer, I was obligated to work on this. He had been an old-line staff officer who had never done anything but consular, primarily visas.

Q: What does "old-line staff" mean, for those who might not have heard about this?

MCCOY: Basically, there were a large number of people who had come into the Foreign Service right in the post-war years, who started as clerks, and when that function was abolished, as a consular clerk or passport clerk, adjudicating passport and visa cases. Our workload in those days, from what I could see when I arrived in the '60s—and you know better than I do about this, Bill—was labor intensive. You had to have all these documents, and it was very much involved on citizenship. Of course, this was an outgrowth of the displaced persons that came out of the Second World War, and also the requirements of the McCarran Act for visas, in which you had to have everybody fingerprinted. We went through a very bureaucratic exercise. We had people who were required to adjudicate these cases, and who were very fine and very conscientious about it, but who believed that that was all they were supposed to do.

It was an attitudinal problem in the sense that they also resented the fact that in those days, many officers within the embassy looked down upon them as simply glorified clerks who were not really capable of doing substantive work. I remember one of my bosses in Costa Rica, the second boss I had in Costa Rica in the consular section, who was a man who was almost selected out as a political officer, and they told him he could stay on if he went into the consular cone.

Q: Sounds like consular work is second class.

MCCOY: It was, very definitely. People told me that if I ever expected to have a successful career, I should leave the consular function and should have gone to the political cone, because at that time it had always been put in my efficiency report that I had reporting skills. But I felt that I really had the best of both worlds, because I really did enjoy the consular function, and I believed that if I did the job properly, I would be recognized for it. I think that's been borne out.

Q: Hopefully, just for history, hopefully today this is not a reality, but how did the large mission of Tel Aviv handle a technician as the consul general and some younger or at least more junior officers that didn't look at their work that way?

MCCOY: It became rather embarrassing, because the consul general tended to get pushed aside. I found myself, and some of the other officers would find themselves, constantly pulled out of the section, being used as control officers for congressional delegations. When we had the Black September fight between the Jordanians and Palestinians in September 1970, we were literally working 24 hours a day. We'd work during the day in the visa unit, then we'd all pull shifts commanding the operations center that we had in order to maintain a voice link with our embassy in Amman, which was under direct attack by Palestinian forces, and also helping to provide communications and support to the military airlift that was going on at the time into Jordan. We also had the Sixth Fleet that came in, and our officers were involved in coordinating with the Israelis.

I literally, one time, thought the Third World War was starting. I mean, it was an interesting period and dramatic, but also very scary. One night, in 30 minutes of traffic, I had 24 immediates and six flash messages, three of which were directly from the President to the Charg# of the embassy, because we thought the Syrians were going to invade Jordan to assist the Palestinians, and the Israelis had said if they did that, they would invade Syria. And so on and so forth. So this got to be very tense.

As I say, the consular officers were the backbone of the support, because there were a number of junior officers in the embassy, but for example, the junior officer in the political section was off doing other things, the junior officer in the economic section, who was Wat Cluverius, who has had a marvelous career and is a marvelous officer, was responsible for providing relief assistance to Jordanian and Palestinian refugees by leading convoys from the Gaza Strip across into Jordan. So consequently, what you had was, I think there was one junior officer in the admin section plus the consular section, who provided the support for the embassy to run the operation's center during this crisis, which lasted about three weeks.

Q: So the Middle East is a good place to serve?

MCCOY: Oh, yes, it's very interesting. Never dull.

Q: Let's come home now after all these exciting and challenging and certainly interesting assignments overseas. You did have some assignment at least in language training in Washington. But now you're coming home for good. You're going to go to the Central American desk job, you're going to move on as Special Assistant to Diego Asencio, first Barbara Watson, and finally to be the guru of the consular function, the career counselor.

Let's start with your function as a special assistant to, first, Barbara Watson, then Diego. That took up a total of three years. Where would you like to start on that? What we're really

interested in is your views of those leaders and what it was like to see a huge bureau being administered.

MCCOY: I truly admired Miss Watson. She had literally gone to great lengths to support me during the time that the Jonestown tragedy occurred. I was under very heavy attack by members of the media, initially members of Congress, and people in the Department itself because of purported allegations made against me in terms of my performance prior to the Jonestown tragedy.

So consequently, I found her a lady of great dignity and of great compassion, and also of dedication to the consular function. She was aware essentially of what I had done during my tenure in Georgetown, and she knew that obviously you can always do better, but that within the constraints of what I had done, she felt I had done a very good job. Therefore, she was very supportive.

So when I found out that the position of special assistant was opening up that year, I went to her and asked her if I could bid for it, and would I be considered. She was, fortunately, delighted that I wished to work for her, and so that, of course, became a happy event until I found out that she was leaving to go to Malaysia as ambassador.

I have to say something here. I almost didn't go as special assistant when I heard that!

Q: I don't blame you!

MCCOY: Coincidentally, at the same time I was called by folks in eastern Europe, and they wanted me to go to Warsaw as a consul general, because the current officer had had a serious medical problem and they had to evacuate him and his family immediately. So consequently, I went up to her to talk about it, and I said, “The new man coming in may decide he wants somebody else as special assistant.” I had this opportunity, and Warsaw was always a dream post, and what about this. She told me who the next man was going to be, and I had known him, not well, but I had known him and he knew me, and she said

that she had strongly recommended me, and he would be delighted if I would stay on. So I felt that under the circumstances, I should do that, so I did.

Q: You were transitional, to use a contemporary term.

MCCOY: Yes, I sure was. So I did have the opportunity. But I was sad. I mean, I would have loved to have spent more time with Miss Watson.

Q: Before we leave, tell us what you felt from your vantage point in just those three months in that special job you were in. What did you see that she fought with or battled with? What was the word she used all the time? Oiled? Put honey on? What is it that she had, and how did she do it?

MCCOY: She had enormous personal prestige, from what I could see. She was well and favorably known up on the Hill and within the Department up to a point. Certainly, she had an excellent relationship with the Secretary and with the Under Secretary for Management, Ben Read. So she used that influence and her own status as a woman of stature within not only the Black American community, but certainly within the American community at large, to develop and to support the consular function.

The areas that she was mostly concerned about and was developing were the consular assistance teams, CAT teams, they used to call them. They would go out when we had a specific problem or where she felt that there were some very serious shortcomings in the management of consular sections abroad.

Q: That people didn't know how to run things?

MCCOY: This was in 1980, and we were still having some problems between officers from the old school, as I've mentioned previously, in the consular function, and the new officers, very bright, dedicated junior officers, and by this time mid-level officers, who were every bit as competent and good as their other Foreign Service colleagues. But unfortunately, many

of the old-line officers were still running sections. We had some very serious management problems over roles, as to what was the proper role of a consular section.

Q: Like you alluded to in Tel Aviv?

MCCOY: Like I alluded to in Tel Aviv, yes. Also there were issues relating to the new Immigration Reform Act, which was taking shape in the Congress at that time, which later became the Immigration Reform Act of 1986. That was an issue. Consular automation was another area that she was very interested in and concerned about. Of course, the consular packet, which was constantly being refined, that we were using overseas in terms of justifying workloads. Workloads were taking off.

Q: In other words, contemporary management skills that we didn't have then?

MCCOY: Basically, that's true. She was most concerned about that, particularly about the future of the consular function because of the exploding workloads that were occurring, particularly in Latin America and in the Far East.

Q: How did she do all those issues with the rest of the Department? That costs money.

MCCOY: She did reasonably well in that regard because she had the great support of Dante Fascell from the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Q: We haven't talked about Congress, have we?

MCCOY: No, we sure haven't, but we'll get into that. And some other people like him. He comes to mind most importantly, because, after all, he was the one who helped implement most of the current packages we have, like food for prisoners and providing visitations to prisoners, and providing additional funds to help American citizens abroad. When I was overseas for the most time, if the families didn't provide prisoners food, as you know, it usually came out of our pockets.

Q: Was Dante responsible for this, or was Barbara encouraging him?

MCCOY: I think it was an outgrowth of a number of things. Obviously we had some very serious scandals involving some American prisoners in places like Thailand, Peru and Mexico. At that time, we were also getting this large explosion in the number of Americans caught for drug offenses. So there was obviously an urgent need to do something. So there was a very close consultation between Congressman Fascell's staff and Miss Watson and her staff.

Q: What was Fascell's role then?

MCCOY: He was the Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Operations. Q: The whole international, not just consular?

MCCOY: No, all international operations. Because of his constituency, which was in Miami, he was very concerned about the consular function. I must say he was extremely supportive and very helpful. I think in some ways he was a lot more helpful than some of our own Department colleagues, including some of our consular colleagues, in understanding the need to do something. Miss Watson certainly understood. I'm not sure many members of the bureau understood.

Q: What did she do about this?

MCCOY: From my limited perspective of the time . . .

Q: But you were her right arm!

MCCOY: For the three months. She, of course, was constantly prodding people to come up with responses needed to implement and put these things into a form so that legislation could be enacted, and also the reorganization to make the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, so that we would have a much more responsive bureaucracy, if you will, or

office, to support American-citizen problems, particularly those cases involving the deaths of American citizens, missing American citizens, and American prisoners. That was the big issue.

Q: Did she knock a few heads together?

MCCOY: I'm not so sure I'd say she knocked heads together. I think what she hoped was that this reorganization, and with the support from the Hill, things would be implemented. I'm not saying she couldn't be ruthless. I, in my time with her, did not see her actually knock heads together, as you would put it, but she certainly had a way of dealing with those people. In other words, if they couldn't be removed from the position, she just worked around them.

Q: Let's move then from this feeling of Barbara's last three months with you, to the new head of Consular Affairs. How did Diego Asencio pick up from Barbara, and how did he take some of these things? Was he enthusiastic?

MCCOY: He was a totally different person. Where Miss Watson could be very quiet and very serene, Diego was very active, energetic, aggressive, ideas coming out all the time, a true political animal. When I say that, this man was a political officer's political officer. He dealt in policy. He was struck by the fact that apart from [the fact that] Miss Watson had a lot of initiatives going when she left, there was still a lot of resistance to them within the bureaucracy of consular affairs, which, to be very honest, was very reactive, very passive, and certainly not in a policy formulation mode at all.

Q: It was protective? Maybe people were afraid.

MCCOY: Frankly, I don't know what they were afraid of. Q: Something new?

MCCOY: Well, that, obviously, and not knowing how to deal with someone like Diego Asencio. We must not forget, also, that the Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary was a Mr. Robert Fritts.

Q: He came in at the same time?

MCCOY: He came in about the same time I did, so he had about three and a half months with Miss Watson, then Diego. Bob Fritts was an economic officer and had very little knowledge of the consular function, but one thing he understood, he understood management, he understood goal setting, he understood priorities, and he understood how that building worked. By that I mean the Department of State. I'm sure we had very few people in the consular bureau who either understood or cared how the building worked and how to get problems resolved outside of their own consular milieu and their own little contacts on the Hill.

The result is that Diego really shook the place up. I think Miss Watson would have if she'd stayed, but there's no doubt that Diego in many ways did.

Q: With Bob Fritts's help.

MCCOY: Bob Fritts and I were the hatchet people. We were the bad-news people. In other words, what I mean by that is that my mode as Diego's special assistant, as he said, I had only one job requirement in that whole three years, and that was to keep him out of jail. That's all he told me. As long as I kept him out of jail, he was fine. So that meant that every piece of paper that came to that front office, I looked at. I never changed people's drafts, because I don't think that's right, because I'm not the drafter. However, I always reserve the right to send notes in over the drafts or the finished product. Bob Fritts did the same thing. We found that the bureau was not at all active.

I have to go back, if you will give me a moment here. In my previous job, I'd been a desk officer for the Southern Caribbean. I had a very active two years as desk officer. I know

you want to get into this later, but I think it's important to set the stage. One of the things I learned was how to formulate and implement policy, including where I was almost one on one with the Secretary of State on two occasions. Unfortunately, because I was the only one who knew anything about it, and that was the case when we had a revolution in Suriname, and nobody knew anything about Suriname or cared until it happened. Then suddenly everybody needed to know, and the result was that I and one other person literally put together our policy that related to Suriname.

So when I took this job, I at least had a knowledge of how the Department worked. So one of my functions was to develop a special assistant network throughout the Department, people like Arnie Raphel, Tony Gillespie, and Gary Matthews. Unfortunately, one is deceased, one is retired, one is our ambassador to Chile. People like that, plus Jerry Bremer and others, who worked up on the seventh floor. I went to those bureaus that I felt interacted the most with us, like ARA, EUR, EAP, NEA, where we had most of the major policy issues. Then also dealing with HA and RP.

Q: This is from CA, you're talking about.

MCCOY: Right. From CA. These are the people that I would work mostly with, the line people up in the Secretariat, because one of the things people in CA, even still in 1980 and '81 were not used to, when you needed to do a memorandum for a seventh-floor principal, you needed it now. Nobody was interested in excuses or, “I've got to go home at 5:00,” or, “I can't do this because the visa law says this.” That's not acceptable. You have to do it. Many times I found myself having to write the response for one of the directorates, which I didn't really like doing, and they certainly didn't like, but I didn't have any choice.

We had marvelous people in the bureau. We had some very talented people who, when given the opportunity, performed admirably. The problem was they just weren't used to it, and they just had never been challenged in that way. They had never been exposed, unfortunately, to, if I may say so, some of the experiences I'd had in the interfunctional

area. They had always just been consular officers. Not that they didn't have the ability to do anything I did; they simply never had the opportunity.

Q: Are you saying this is Diego's inspiration, Diego's change of management style?

MCCOY: In part, I think so. He was very much empirically oriented. In fact, at one point there was some suggestion that he take over RP and the asylum function in HA, and certain other areas, as well. He had a lot of people worried in the Department. He also had a great deal of status himself coming out of the hostage situation in Colombia and as ambassador to Colombia, a successful Foreign Service officer. He had outstanding relations on the Hill with Senator Simpson and Congressman Fascell. Congressman Rodino, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, was his congressman and sent his son to West Point. I mean, we had contacts. We had Senator Simpson even drop in on some of our staff meetings.

So when we would go up for things like the Immigration and Reform Act, we were playing a leading role in that. We played a leading role in changing the whole attitude towards the Amerasian visa issue. Consular automation also took on automation programs within the consular function such as passport automation. He generated a civil service task force to meet the needs of our civil service employees in CA. He began to set up through Bob Fritts a centralized anti-fraud program. Bob Fritts, for example, had his goals and priorities organization, where the bureau had set certain goals and priorities, and he would hold monthly meetings to see how well we were meeting them. God help anybody if they weren't meeting them!

I can remember times when he would literally call in deputy assistant secretaries within CA and tell them they were being obstructive, they were not doing their job properly, they were letting some of their people mislead them, and many times I would have to go give bad news in that regard.

Q: You said you were the breaker of bad news. Am I hearing, though, that Diego was also breaking bad news when he had to?

MCCOY: No.

Q: Never?

MCCOY: One of the interesting things about Diego is he is a very nice person, and he just has difficulty dealing with confrontation in that context. It's not that he's afraid to make decisions, but he simply did not like to hurt people or to tell people they weren't doing the job properly.

I can remember one issue that affected OCS. There were others that affected all of them, but this was one in particular. They were supposed to provide a response to Congress on conditions of prisons and whether they were meeting goals and so on. It was late, and it wasn't very responsive. So we sent it back down and asked them to redo it, and it came back up, and really they hadn't changed it very much. I can remember standing in front of him, and it's one of the few times I ever saw him really lose his temper. Of course, he yelled and really gave me hell, saying he couldn't use this, and what did I expect him to do with this. He literally threw the product across the desk at me and told me to go down and have them fix it.

So I went down, and I had to tell an unhappy deputy assistant secretary that this was not acceptable, and he'd better get it straightened out or I was going to have to write it, and he probably wouldn't like what I wrote. So we eventually got it put forward.

We had similar problems with passports. We had a problem with passport insurance in that we almost had the system collapse on us in 1982. One of the things about working with Diego was that if you had to bring him bad news—and I would bring him bad news—you never suffered for it. If you brought him bad news and you were honest about it, and you had some ideas about how to rectify it, he didn't care who you were, whether you were

a class-six officer, class-one officer, whatever. He would be willing to listen to you, and he really liked that. He liked people who had ideas, who thought about their jobs, who were concerned about their jobs, who really wanted to do a good job.

Q: Since all of it on his side was positive, did that positiveness get through to the troops, to the things that Barbara Watson had started working on in terms of modernizing management? Did people begin to see the light?

MCCOY: I think so. Particularly the mid-grade and junior officers really liked it. To give you an example, we went to our first consular conference in Canada, and he was just absolutely appalled because of the general nature of the discussions. He was literally bored. So he came back and said, “McCoy, if you don't change this, we're never going to have another consular conference again, because I'm not going to sit through this again.”

So we came up with a Consular Policy Management Conference, and we changed the focus from worrying about whether you should issue H visas or F visas, to how we should treat groups of people and how we were going to deal in a policy format with the rest of the embassies, and were we getting through to the governments on the issues that we needed to get through to the governments. For example, we held a conference in India, and we found out that our consular people in Calcutta, for example, could not call directly on their counterparts simply because there was some problem within the central government. So at that point, Diego, the ambassador, our consul general in Delhi, and the consular officer from Calcutta went and got it solved. I mean, those are the kinds of issues that he wanted to get into.

Q: You have certainly illustrated that he is a political animal. You also said he is a political officer's political officer. It sounds to me, though, that he wasn't necessarily a consular officer's patron in the sense that his impatience with talking about H visas or some of the realities that you can call the nitty-gritty of the consular functions are still there. How did he

bring these together? Did he leave it to others? Did he understand better that there is the other side to the consular?

MCCOY: He understood it, but he also felt that he had people to deal with those issues, that he was an Assistant Secretary of State and that he had a very competent Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and, if I may say so, a reasonably competent special assistant, and people who could synthesize these things for him through his deputy assistant secretaries and his office directors, and present him with a package. If it made sense to him, he'd do it. But he himself was not going to spend his time worrying about that, because he felt that one of the problems with the consular function is that it was not policy oriented. On this I agree with him wholeheartedly. By that I mean when you get into issues in the Department of State, not out in an embassy, but in the Department of State . . .

Q: Good. I think you better make this distinction.

MCCOY: Yes. In the Department of State, policy is formulated and implemented. Not out in the field. Well, it's implemented in the field, obviously. But what I mean is that the decisions are made in Washington that are going to affect everybody around the world. The consular bureau had a lot of decisions that were being made, that they were not part of, which impacted on them.

For example, the problem of visas to lawyers to Japan was being handled totally by EAP, with very little reference to CA at one point. Problems relating to passport fraud issues that were coming up, in which we were not somehow involved, where we should have been involved. We had problems that related to the Immigration Reform Act in some of the problems in Mexico on border issues that initially CA was being ignored on. Also problems of the return of the Cuban marielitos, which was another issue that we had to get involved in and should have been involved in very early, and we weren't.

Part of that was because the consular bureau was not very effective in being aggressive in defending its turf, if you will, and Diego changed that. He changed it to the point where people called and said we were harassing them in that sense. But on the other hand, we got people's attention. We had very strong support initially from Secretary Haig, Deputy Secretary Clark, and later, Secretary Shultz. They all understood the problems that existed, because every time Secretary Shultz went up to the Hill to talk about our Central American policy, he got hit over the head about missing journalists and murdered nuns, which were consular problems.

Q: So what I'm hearing is that Diego, given his extreme sensitivity and human qualities, was very good in the home office in relating to Congress and to the establishment.

Now as a devil's advocate, I'd like to go back to the field again, where you were, and say, “Gee, nobody back there understands what our problem is.” How did Diego react, and how did you react to Diego's reaction to, “Nobody back there understands us. They understand, the big picture, but they don't understand my H visas and my lawyers.”

MCCOY: That's a very good question. I mentioned the Delhi issue. Most of the officers at New Delhi in the conference we held there in 1980 were almost entirely first-tour junior officers, in small posts like Karachi, Lahore, Kabul, Islamabad, Madras, and places like that. There were a few senior people. Most of them were junior officers.

They were faced at that time with a very serious Afghan and Iranian refugee problem, and at that time we didn't have refugee coordinators or anything like that out in that area. Literally, embassies, for the most part, dumped it all on the consular sections, where we had, in some cases, first-tour officers.

So Diego said, “What do you need from us?” Of course, they didn't know what they needed. But at the same time, I suggested and Diego said, “Look, if you come together and only you know what your problems are, because this is all new, you come together

and caucus. You tell me what you need and I'll see what I can do to get it for you." So they literally did. They got together a caucus.

As it turned out, I later got feedback from them saying that was one of the most marvelous times they had had in their career, because basically, what they did was formulate a refugee policy for South Asia.

Q: What did Diego think about it?

MCCOY: He thought it was great. He thought it was absolutely marvelous, because here people were thinking about their jobs, they were coming up with some answers. They weren't sitting back waiting for the Department to give them answers or decide what their fate was to be, because the Department didn't have answers in that sense. We were faced with an exploding refugee area, everything had been focused on Southeast Asia, and suddenly here we were in South Asia, and there was very little experience. Certainly nobody in Washington had much experience.

Q: Let's jump ahead three years to the end of his tour and the end of your tour, because you parted about the same time.

MCCOY: He left about four months after I did.

Q: So you were there pretty much through his entire tour. In retrospect, what do you think he learned out of this? What do you think he gained out of it? What do you think his contributions were to the consular function?

MCCOY: I think what he gained out of this was a real appreciation of the difficulties that the consular function faced, both in terms of its relationships within the Department and in doing the job abroad. I think he was very forceful in presenting this case to Congress, and I think that had it not been for him, there would not have been an Immigration Reform Act.

I think he worked very hard with the Senate and House staffs on this particular package of legislation, and I think the other thing he did was raise the level of expectations of consular officers to strive to be better. That has certainly paid dividends if you look at where the consular cone is today and where it was then. I can discuss that later from my experience in personnel.

Diego made consular work fun. I can remember the first thing he said to me. He said, “Look, we're going to have a lot of fun.” Not everything he did turned out well, and not every idea he had was great. Lots of times I told him I thought he was full of crap, that I felt he was just way off the track on a lot of things.

Q: Would he listen to you?

MCCOY: Yes, I think so, by and large. Sometimes he did, sometimes he didn't. He reserved the right.

Q: Would he hear you?

MCCOY: Yes, definitely. That was one of the things I guess I enjoyed so much out of the job, because he utilized me and my skills to the best of my advantage. I'm not a creative person, but I am an operations-oriented person in the sense that I can get things done and I can solve problems. I think that's been a basic hallmark of my career. He utilized those skills the best, and I appreciated that. He understood that. He gave me a free rein. I could literally do anything, go anywhere, get involved in anything within obvious reason, without being disruptive.

Q: In a historical sense, as we look back over 20 years and see the last three years at the top, if you will, with Diego, you have seen a tremendous growth in the consular function with the establishment of professional honor and so on. Is that a good summary?

MCCOY: I think so.

Q: Let's go on now to your next assignment. As your last assignment in the Department, you brought all these very valuable experiences together into the most valuable of all, in many ways, and that is the senior career development officer for the consular function. You had one deputy and then, of course, you had all those elements out there that worked with you to make assignments and to give counseling. Let's get into that area from your own words, telling us, first of all, about what the function was and how you performed in it.

MCCOY: Basically, my job, along with my deputies, was to make sure that assignments of middle-grade and senior consular-cone officers were made, their ideas were developed, their careers were looked after, their personal problems seen to, their particular assignment preferences reviewed and discussed, and, in general, supported.

The other thing I felt was very important was bringing to the other departments or bureaus in the Department a realization that consular-cone officers were truly multifaceted and talented, and that by accepting consular-cone officers, they were going to get some very talented people who had a multitude of skills that a lot of their political, economic, and administrative colleagues did not possess. So in that regard, I had my own agenda when I went into the job.

Q: Was it accepted by your immediate peers, your own officers, the other cone officers?

MCCOY: Not exactly, because obviously I was going after jobs for my clients, which is the term we used for our people that we assist, that they wanted for their own officers. So there is always inherent conflict in that area, because we're always competing. In many cases, two or three career-development officers are going to be competing with bureaus for one job. We all may have candidates for a specific job. So obviously a lot of my desires and my agenda did not exactly dovetail with theirs, so there was some conflict, although I must say in terms of our personal relationships, we all got along very well.

Q: Did you have even-handed treatment, maybe even better, from your supervisors and people who had to make those hard decisions above you?

MCCOY: You'd have to talk to my former supervisors in that regard, but if you want my own personal opinion, if I may say so . . .

Q: You're the only one I have.

MCCOY: Okay. I would say that I was probably successful in 90% of the cases against my other colleagues, in part because I knew my clients better than they knew theirs, also because I generally politicked with the bureaus beforehand, using the network that I developed both as a desk officer and then later as a special assistant to convince senior officers within the Department, country directors and others that my candidate was clearly the best qualified. I wasn't bashful about seeking assistance from Assistant Secretary Clark or other assistant secretaries or higher in the Department who I happened to know personally through previous assignments.

Q: Sounds like politics at work.

MCCOY: Absolutely. But it's more than that. In order to be a successful career development officer, you've got to be well organized, and the most important thing is you've got to know your people. The way you do that, I felt, was to develop career development packages on each officer who is up for reassignment. Every officer who's up for reassignment, you look at his or her performance folder and you talk to them personally. I probably had the largest telephone bill in the entire Department of State at some point, because I was making telephone calls to Singapore, Japan, Jakarta, and to posts all throughout Africa, contacting my officers personally.

I felt it was not only important to have what they wanted on a piece of paper, which they all do, but it was more important to get their feeling about things. Why did they want particular

assignments? Where were their careers going? What did they think of their careers? What did they really want to do?

It's interesting. I mentioned previously that when Diego and I first got together, he said we were going to have fun together, and we certainly did. I have to tell you, every job that I went to in the Foreign Service, I had fun with. I took a lot of different jobs in my career because those were the jobs I felt offered me the most in terms of broadening experience and, most important, those were jobs that I wanted to do.

For example, when I left Guyana, I really wanted to be a desk officer. I felt that a desk officer is the beginning and end of everything that happens in the State Department.

Q: Why did you think this?

MCCOY: From my own experience of seeing desk officers at work and understanding, more or less. I say more or less because I'd never formally had an assignment within the Department, other than a training assignment. I just felt that if I were going to be a successful Foreign Service officer, that it was important that I experience this at the desk level. I was very fortunate that I had an ambassador who supported me strongly. When I left Georgetown, I went back as desk officer for Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dutch and French islands in the Caribbean.

Q: Was it hard to get that job as a consular officer? That's a rather senior political job.

MCCOY: At the time, it was. But as I say, I had the support of the ambassador. There had been a few instances when consular-cone officers by that time were beginning to get desk jobs. It wasn't totally unheard of, but it wasn't the norm either. However, as I mentioned previously, consular issues loom very large in the Caribbean because of immigration, illegal immigration, and the large tourist trade we have in the area. So in many aspects, the consular experience is very important.

I was also, again, fortunate to have bosses like Ashley Hewitt and Rob Warne, who were the country directors in ARA/CAR at that time. They were very supportive and helpful to me because I had to learn how to operate within the department, which was a world all of its own, as we both know. This was really painful, but you persevere and you learn. I found out that truly, you learn how to interact not only within the Department, but in almost every executive branch of the government, with folks outside, with just the general American public, with industry, with the Hill. It was a marvelous experience.

Q: Taking this experience back to your personnel job, these are the kinds of jobs in the Department that you were fighting to get consular officers into? Or were you fighting to get them into consular jobs?

MCCOY: Basically, I set a goal to myself. Everybody was so worried when I went into the job because there were becoming fewer and fewer consular jobs and more and more consular-cone officers. We had a real imbalance at the 3, 2, and 1 level. It may seem strange to say that, but there were. You might have as many as forty 01 officers up for reassignment, and there may be 16 consular jobs. But my goal had been, for example, that I was going to place at least 50% of all consular-cone officers in interfunctional jobs. That was my goal.

Q: Interfunctional means desk officer?

MCCOY: It means desk jobs, what we call international relations jobs, for examples, in bureaus like HA, RP, MCT.

Q: Special assistants?

MCCOY: Special assistants.

Q: Were they acceptable consular officers?

MCCOY: As it turned out, I was quite successful in placing many officers. For example, in PER/FCA, when I left, I think more than half of the officers were consular-cone officers.

Q: It sounds to me as if you had a simple mathematical problem, too, because you had so many excess consular officers and no positions to put them into. The system had to place them.

MCCOY: That's true. When I first arrived, we did have a number of officers over complement, whom I was able, for the most part, to move off over complement and put in regular jobs. But again, it was the attitude that I felt, in looking in the backgrounds of what I could see was becoming a very strong consular cone, if you will, because these officers in the '84 to '86 time frame, the officers I was dealing with, were officers who had come in basically since, let's say, 1970, with some exceptions. All these officers, again with some exceptions, the more senior officers, probably 80% of them had come in through the examination route. So they were clearly intellectually as competent as their political, economic, and administrative colleagues.

What I found, much to my great surprise and delight, was that the regional bureaus, as well as the functional bureaus, were absolutely delighted to get recommendations for officers, because a number of the bureaus like IO, OES, RP, HA, their positions were always underbid. Now, admittedly, some of them should have been underbid, but there were a lot of them that were very interesting, like Director of the Office of Asylum Affairs in HA, which got a recent officer promoted to the senior Foreign Service; a number of positions in OES which dealt with some very interesting problems, polar issues and the environment and areas like that, in which some consular officers had some very strong credentials; and science and technology, in which, surprisingly enough, a number of consular-cone officers have a background. Not just desk jobs, although we were successful in getting desk jobs for consular-cone officers.

Q: These are the examples, the realities of what you did as the guru to place people, but it's a step away from what you were talking about before, which is fundamental to this and so dear to the hearts of every junior officer, and that is career development. That is to say, "What's ahead for me? How can I grow? How can I get promoted? How can I get to the top? How can I get power?"

In that regard, how did you plan a person's future other than the immediate next assignment and get him placed? How did you look to a career development program for the officers?

MCCOY: As I mentioned earlier, I did a profile on everyone. I did a number of other things, too. One of the things I did, I always lectured at the A100 class, not at the con general class, but at the A100 class. I talked to all of them about the consular function and the importance that the consular function had in relationship with the rest of the Foreign Service, and gave a number of examples. I discussed with them the career, how they ought to look at their careers, how to pay attention to their careers in terms of developing them.

For example, taking the skills that they knew, the skills that they brought with them in developing their expertise. Because it's axiomatic: you do well in a job, you get a good reputation, you get good efficiency reports, you get promoted. That's basically the bottom line.

Q: Not everybody understands that.

MCCOY: I agree with you, but it was very important for me to develop this sense of responsibility within the individual officer. Most officers say, "I want to do this. I want to do that." That's true. A lot of consular-cone officers all want to be principal officers, they all think they're great managers, and they all think they're great supervisors. We both know that's not true.

The other problem is to understand expectations and be able to understand limitations. That's very important. Officers, also at the same time understanding their strengths, also have to understand their weaknesses. If you can look through a package of an officer and determine that, for example, they don't write well, then you don't want him being a desk officer. At the same time, he or she may have other skills, language skills or others, he or she may be able to motivate people well. So then maybe you put them in a personnel job or others. Admittedly, we're getting back to assignments.

In career development, you look at a person's assignment history, you talk to him or her, make them think about what he or she wants to do. That's very important. Where do they think they're going to be ten years from now? What jobs do they think are going to get them there?

I would then take my experience and say, “All right, if you want to get ahead, these are the kind of jobs. You should have at least one or two interfunctional jobs. You should at some point be a consular section chief. You might aspire to be a principal officer.” The only unfortunate fact is we keep continually closing posts, so this limits the opportunity for officers to do that, although frankly, at the 01 level and above, being a principal officer I don't think, except in a few cases, is really that much of a career-enhancing position anymore. That's, again, a personal choice. So when you get to the 01 level, you've got to be competitive to compete for the senior Foreign Service, if that is your goal.

There are a number of officers who, realistically, are never going to be competitive for the senior Foreign Service.

Q: How did you break that news to them? How did you work with people like that?

MCCOY: Basically, my point to them was that in some cases it wasn't from lack of ability; it was simply that they never took the tough jobs. They never took the jobs in Lagos or, if you will, Georgetown, coming back to Washington and trying to take an international

relations job, whether it's a desk job or not. They wouldn't do that. So consequently, when they would start to compete, they were at a decided disadvantage. I would lay that out, particularly to the 3s and the 2s and some of the 1s.

Q: Could they accept it?

MCCOY: Most would. There were a few who wouldn't. They simply wouldn't understand it. That's when I'd get back to personal experience. I'd show them my own career pattern, and then I'd show them those of other officers who were successful. One of the things that I always pointed out to them, I always debriefed the selection boards, particularly those from 01 to OC. In three years running, plus debriefing of all the inspectors I had done as a special assistant up in CA, and again all the briefings and debriefings for inspectors in PER, putting all of that together, I was able to convince officers that what I was saying was accurate, because nine out of ten times it was proven.

Q: Taking your experience in places like PER and other elements that go into the realities of a successful career, did you sit down with the officers, with their individual files, like a drafting officer's boss who goes over and shows the realities of that file?

MCCOY: Wherever that was possible, I did that. Obviously, for officers who were some distance overseas (it was also unfortunate that travel funds were so limited that I never had a chance to travel in the job, which was probably considered my biggest failure), it was difficult to convince those people.

Q: But in two years, you or your deputy could, in principle, see every officer almost.

MCCOY: I think so. I can't think of any officer that either she or I did not at some point talk to personally. One year it was Terry Kleinkoff; the second year it was Gwen Caronway. Terry, when I took over, and later Gwen, when she came in to work with me, I pointed out that that was something I wanted them to do. I wanted them to make personal contact, if overseas, by telephone, to every one of the officers that was up for reassignment.

Q: Could you get others in the network to help you with this, such as the officers' bosses, the posts?

MCCOY: In some cases, but that's easier said than done, because the only time I really would do that is if for some reason I was having difficulty getting the officer to understand what it is that they had to do for themselves, as well as what I could do for them. In a few cases I would call the DCM, or in a couple of cases I'd call the head of the section, depending on the circumstances, and say, “You ought to go talk to so and so, because I don't think they really understand what's happening. They haven't bid realistically, and they haven't really come to grips with what it is they want to do with their career.” To me that's the DCM function. That's not a chief of section function; that's a DCM function.

Q: Sounds like a DCM might be a manager in your terms.

MCCOY: A DCM is a manager, no doubt about it.

Q: I thought he was a political officer that grew up.

MCCOY: I don't want to digress on this, but we both know that, unfortunately, the failure rate of DCMs—and I must say even with consular-cone officers, as well as political officers—is simply because they don't understand the difference between supervising and managing, and they don't understand what the total role is.

Q: What's the difference?

MCCOY: Managers have to understand what the total program is. You look at an embassy or a section, you have to understand how you're going to manage all elements within both the mission and/or the section, to make sure the place operates, functions smoothly and efficiently.I found that to be very true in running little posts like Adana and running a reasonably good-sized level-three embassy like Georgetown. You really have to understand. You also have to understand what the functions are of each section,

and you have to understand how to make them work together so that their reports are done on time. Sure, you have to know what's going on in the country, so that when the ambassador's not there, you have to be able to look at political reporting and know that this is accurate and properly drafted. That's all part of it, but first and foremost, you are a program manager.

The section chief is a program manager. So many times in the consular function, section chiefs think they're still supervisors. In other words, they're supervising a few FSNs and junior officers and making sure visas get out. They don't understand the total picture.

This comes through very clearly for inspections. It's interesting how easy it is to find out who the good managers are and who aren't. It was so clear to me from the job I had as special assistant, because one of the functions that Diego expected of me was to be his headhunter for senior officers and also for recommendations as to who would run the primary sections abroad and to fill the basic important positions within the bureau, and who to support for positions outside of the bureau.

Q: Back now to the career development of the individual. So much, it seems—maybe more in recent years, I don't know—is based on lore, what kind of assignments to have and what I need to do to punch my ticket, and that sort of thing. Some of this seems to relate to the tremendous pressures today because of the selection-out issues, as well as when you bid on the job.

MCCOY: The bidding of the jobs, and also because, particularly if you're a class-one officer, the six-year window.

Q: So it seems that this is all tied together, and the poor officer now no longer has control, from his standpoint, of his future. He's completely dependent upon a bid system that he maybe doesn't understand. Do you want to comment on this new bidding system and where we are today, and particularly as consular officers see themselves?

MCCOY: By putting together a career development package and in talking to officers, one of the things I hoped to do was to give them some ideas about bidding on jobs that they would have never thought of in the past, which would help their careers, particularly in the interfunctional area. Most consular officers, by the time they've finished their second tour, they have a pretty good idea of the consular function, depending on where they've been. Therefore, the consular jobs are no mystery to them.

There are a lot of officers who, for various reasons, will want to go to a particular geographic area, which has absolutely nothing to do with the job, but for family reasons or personal reasons, or maybe simply because they've been in a hell hole like Guayaquil for a couple of years and they just want to go to London, even though in terms of a career move, they're really ready to be a section chief, but in fact, they're lucky if they're even going to be a unit chief. But they just want to get back to some civilization and go to London. That's fine.

My job was to discuss it with them and say, “Where do you think you're going to have fun? Where do you think you're going to be most happy?” Because a happy officer is a productive officer. That's basic.

Q: Someone who is having fun.

MCCOY: Absolutely. You find out which post people have fun and which posts aren't, and generally those that are not are those that are badly managed. I used to talk to the junior officers at the A100 class. About 98% of them were going to consular jobs right out of the A100 class, as we both know. I would make no bones about going down the list and saying, “You're going to have a good time because of thus and so,” or, “Good luck.” So on and so forth. I often wonder when they got out there, some people may not like my comment, but the point is well taken, in that if the positions are not well managed, then the future of the Foreign Service suffers severely, because so many times you may have

God knows how many really bright, great officers lost to the Service because of a lousy manager.

Consequently, there have been a few cases where I deliberately would not assign officers into jobs where I knew they did a poor job of supervising or managing in their current or past assignment, and I would make sure if they went to another job, it was not a job where they supervised anybody. Some of them complained about it, and I was pretty blunt with them on a few occasions, saying, “You've got to understand what you're doing, and you haven't learned what you're doing. You've got these problems, and these problems have surfaced at your post and section. How are you going to learn how to deal with them if you don't understand yourself and your role?”

Q: So what I'm hearing, among other things, Dick, is you've got to break some bad news, even when you're in personnel.

MCCOY: I'm sure there are some people, if you mentioned my name to them right now, they'd spit on the floor.

Q: We don't want to end with that! (Laughs) You have given a lot of your time, Dick. Are there any summary remarks about that last job or anything else?

MCCOY: What I would like to leave people with, though, is the fact that I think the consular cone is in the best shape it's ever been in its life. I think that the officers that it was my pleasure to work with in the last eight years of my career at the class 3, 2, and 1 level, are absolutely as good or better than any of the officers of other cones.

I can remember a comment made by the head of the Junior Officer Division, who is not a consular-cone officer. In a staff meeting at PER one day, he looked around at everybody and said, “To all you other CDOs, this message is meant. I'm telling you right now the junior consular-cone officers are the brightest, most highly motivated, most competitive

group of officers it is my pleasure to deal with." And he was in the job the same two years that I was.

Q: Maybe we should end on that, Dick. I thank you very much.

MCCOY: You're welcome.

End of interview